

# Journey to New York State a study in contrasts

I have been to New York several times but I never went there by car.

This time friends asked us to join them for a motor trip. We went to the Finger Lakes District in New York State first, where we stayed with a couple who have a fine old house there. The Finger Lakes have been gouged out by huge glaciers of the last ice age and the result is one of the loveliest landscapes anywhere.

The Finger Lakes District consists predominantly of tree covered hills, and the main crop seems to be wine. The slopes are planted with winebergs, and the quality of the wine is excellent. The settlements are many and they are small.

There seems to be little industry in the area, with the result that the old patterns of fields, wining roads, and small towns and villages, have remained fairly undisturbed. Even very grand, old houses with classical facades, sell for modest sums of money, and there are many trailer homes here and there, beside a lake or in a grove of trees. Our poor Willow Park people would not have any difficulties to relocate their community in the Finger Lake District. But they might have trouble finding work there.

We continued to Dover in New Jersey, where a young man from my hometown in Germany started a knitting mill 100 years ago. By 1910, he had become the largest producer of ladies silk stockings in the world! He died in 1932, his factory was sold, and his widow and daughter moved away from Dover. I am searching for possible descendents who can tell me more about the man, and I

went to Dover to meet several old people who knew him 60 years ago.

We had planned to drive to New York City from Dover, but we found out there was a bus line close to a wonderful motel we had settled into, where we could catch a bus for New York, only 30 miles away, every half-hour. We did that for the next three days.

Every morning, after breakfast, we boarded the bus that whisked us to Manhattan in one hour.

The area around New York City is very much like our area here around Toronto, only much rougher. It never ceases to amaze me how ugly a townscape becomes when it is shaped solely by commercial interests. You have the impression you are in a war zone, and I had to admit, from a visual point of view, the result of unfettered capitalism is as unpleasant and as destructive as the result of the unfettered socialism I saw in East Germany a year ago.

The highway to New York was lined with failed businesses and boarded-up fast-food places, and a forest of wooden posts, with wires for every utility purpose dangling from them, created a visual pollution of rare distinction. When I returned to Ontario my eyes had become so used to the havoc of the New Jersey landscape near New York City, that the Toronto area looked, for the first time, like a place created by people with a sense of beauty. It all depends on what we use for comparison.

New York City, of course, is incomparable.

Our bus entered a system of



Ideas and The Arts  
by  
John Sommer

special bus lanes on which hundreds of buses from every part of New Jersey, surged like a mighty river, through the Lincoln Tunnel, to resurface in the middle of Manhattan, in a gigantic terminal built like an ascending serpentine or the inside of a nautilus shell. Buses were disgorging their passengers on many levels of huge crowds exploded into the surrounding streets and onto sidewalks covered with the bodies of the poor and homeless, who slept there in the midst of the most fantastic city noises.

Only minutes later, we arrived by taxi at the palace of Henry Clay Frick on Central Park. Mr. Frick was a Pittsburgh coke and steel tycoon and one of the greatest American art collectors ever. His palace and his collection have been preserved and are one of the grandest experiences any art lover can have in New York City.

The next day we went by boat to the beautifully renovated Statue of Liberty and from there to nearby Ellis Island, which has been restored and opened as a Museum of Immigration.

We all have come to this continent, either personally or in the guise of our ancestors. The trauma of arriving at a foreign shore is a part of our history. The new museum on Ellis Island is a moving monument to this trauma, and a must for every visitor to New York.

I cannot possibly write about everything we did in New York, there isn't enough space, but I want to mention one more, near magical edifice. At the most northern tip of Manhattan, in Fort

Tyron Park, is a museum devoted to the art of the Middle Ages, called The Cloisters.

It is made up of actual parts of medieval buildings that the Rockefeller family brought over from Europe and got assembled in New York. The Cloisters houses the famous Unicorn Tapestries, besides other great treasures, and the spell the museum and it's gardens casts over the visitors is overwhelming.

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